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ABSTRACT

The teaching of African languages in the United States at the elementary and secondary levels is rare, but a number of schools offer one or more of the major African languages for instruction. This digest looks at the current state of African language instruction in the United States at the elementary and secondary levels and is divided into the following sections: Heritage language; legislation promoting language instruction; teacher qualifications; professional organizations; and resources. A list of private schools or organizations that teach Arabic and a list of public schools that teach Arabic or Swahili are provided at the end of the digest. (Author/JL)

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AFRICAN LANGUAGES AT THE K-12 LEVEL

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Digest

October 1996

African Languages at the K-12 Level

(EDO-FL-97-02)

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Although the teaching of African languages at the elementary and secondary levels is rare, a number of schools offer one or more of the following major African languages at these levels: Arabic (North Africa), Hausa (West Africa), Swahili (East Africa), Wolof (Senegal), Yoruba (Nigeria), and Xhosa and Zulu (South Africa). Strictly speaking, Arabic is a colonial language brought to North Africa by Arabs from the Arabian peninsula. Through the spread of Islam and the introduction of Quranic schools, Arabic has flourished in Africa. U.S. universities and government agencies classify Arabic as both an African and a Middle Eastern language.

Heritage Language

American children whose ancestors spoke an African language often seek to study it. These students include both recent immigrants and African Americans whose ancestors were slaves. The latter often have limited knowledge of their language heritage, because slavery discouraged the retention of language and cultural identity. Given this loss, many African-American students choose to study one of the more prominent African languages, such as Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, or Zulu. Recently, African Americans who promote an Afrocentric curriculum have included the instruction of African languages and their related cultures. In support of an Afrocentric approach to education, new African immigrants frequently teach at places such as The Swahili Institute (Chicago).

Many immigrants from North Africa who speak Arabic have come to the United States recently as scholars or professionals. These Arab Americans tend to congregate in major cities, which enables them to sponsor Arabic-language newspapers, radio, and television stations. Their children may attend private or weekend schools to study Arabic and learn about Arabic culture.

Legislation Promoting Language Instruction

Since the 1970s, federal legislation has provided funding that K-12 teachers could apply to African language instruction. However, the lack of grass-roots demands for such instruction has discouraged teachers and administrators from offering programs.

Educate America Act of 1994. This Act designated that major disciplines, including foreign languages, design national standards for instruction at the K-12 level. To date, no teachers of African languages have participated in the preparation of generic standards at these levels. However, Africanists are in the process of developing proficiency guidelines for Hausa, Swahili, and Yoruba. The Arabic instructor at North Atlanta High School (GA) has worked in collaboration with universities funded by the Higher Education Act (HEA) to create the Arabic ACTFL proficiency guidelines, and several Arabic teachers hold certification in the ACTFL oral proficiency interview.

Foreign Language Act. In 1988, the U.S. Congress passed the Foreign Language Act (FLA) to specify which languages were the most critical ones for U.S. government interests. Legislators designated five languages of which Arabic was one.

FLA also supported summer language programs. One program, the Critical Languages and Area Studies Consortium (CLASC), provided precollegiate instruction, teacher training workshops, educational conferences, and materials development for Arabic. Another program, directed in 1990 by Mohammed Jiyad, provided Arabic instruction for high school students at the Northfield-Mt. Hermon School (MA). The course comprised 6 weeks of instruction, academic year audio conferencing, and 6 weeks of study in Egypt. Most students achieved an intermediate proficiency rating at the end of the program. Jiyad and Mahdi Alosh (Ohio State University) prepared computer programs and textbooks for the course.

Higher Education Act. As a result of reauthorization of the Higher Education Act in 1972, the U.S. Congress stipulated that universities seeking federal funding to promote less commonly taught languages should provide outreach to K-12 teachers. Two funded universities have developed African language instruction for this level. During the academic year, Yale University graduate students offer after-school programs for high school students in Afrikaans, Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, and Zulu. Likewise, University of Wisconsin students have taught Swahili in after-school programs, in summer programs, or at West High School in Madison.

Teacher Qualifications

Presently, no state has a teacher certification program for African languages; an African language certification augments another discipline. Because of the turnover in appointments, few teachers of African languages are members of foreign language organizations, and potential teachers vary in qualifications.

School administrators recruit teachers from four different groups. The highest priority is given to language nationals (expatriates) with native proficiency and a first-hand knowledge of the culture. A second group are African nationals with language teaching experience. Frequently, an African national has learned the target language in school. A third group consists of current U.S. language teachers who hold a state license. The fourth group comprises students (non-Africans) who have studied the African language or who have worked in the country where the African language is spoken.

Professional Organizations

Although K-12 language instruction is not a high priority for all organizations, interest is increasing. The National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages (John Hopkins University, NFLC, 1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036), founded in 1991, encourages instruction at the K-12 level. Members are charged to prepare a language framework that takes into consideration precollegiate instruction.

For teachers of African languages, two organizations can provide support. Teachers of Amharic, Hausa, Swahili, Yoruba, and Xhosa may obtain materials from the African Studies Association (ASA) Outreach Council, Credit Union Bldg., Emory University, Atlanta,

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GA 30322. Members of the African Language Teachers Association (ALTA), c/o Antonia Schleicher, 1414 Van Hise Hall, 1220 Linden Dr., University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706-1557, collaborate with school districts to provide instruction in African languages. In addition, ALTA has task forces for Hausa, Swahili, and Yoruba and publishes a newsletter, *Lugha*, that carries news from the field of African language instruction.

Two organizations link teachers of Arabic: The Middle East Studies Association (MESA), University of Arizona, 1232 North Cherry Ave., Tuscon, AZ 85721, and the American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA), Brigham Young University, 280 HRCB, Provo, UT 84602. Both support materials development and language acquisition. The MESA Outreach Council provides resources for teachers seeking instructional materials for Arabic. AATA publishes *Al-cArabiyya* and *AATA Newsletter* for teachers to share ideas about instruction. Members can also network through Arabic-L (mail service) and an AATA electronic homepage.

Resources

Often, teachers of African languages must create their own teaching materials, and they may also have to contend with multiple-level classes. The Foreign Language Institute and the Peace Corps have developed African-language instructional materials for adults, but teachers must adapt them for their young students. Overseas summer language programs can provide teachers with opportunities to enhance their language proficiency, increase their knowledge of the culture, and collect authentic materials. The National Endowment for the Humanities, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Information Agency, and National Council for U.S.-Arab Relations provide summer curriculum fellowships.

National Foreign Language Resource Centers. All of the National Foreign Language Resource Centers (NFLRC) have projects concerning Arabic instruction. For example, the Ohio State University NFLRC developed an Arabic program for certified secondary school teachers. This program, like CLASC, is a three-year sequence and leads to state certification in Arabic.

Electronic resources. Teachers can utilize electronic media in African languages to expand language and culture contacts. For example, electronic mail service in Afrikaans, Swahili, and Yoruba provides opportunities for maintaining reading and writing skills. Voice of America broadcasts by short-wave radio and offers text on a homepage in Amharic, Arabic, Hausa, and Swahili. Computerized and video lessons are also available for some African languages.

Conclusion

For 15 years, African languages have been offered at the K-12 level in the United States. These courses attract students of African heritage and others seeking a multicultural education. Unfortunately, many of these programs lack basic requirements such as qualified teachers, facilities, funding, textbooks, and regular classes. African languages are rarely part of the regular, institutionalized foreign language offerings. In a few cities, however, administrators encourage African language instruction and have mobilized community support, parental involvement, and cooperating principals and department chairs, and encouraged teacher collaboration, accountability, relevant curricula, and pedagogical flexibility. These programs have adequate instructional materials, learning time, effective teaching practices, and curricula designed by scope and sequence. With more such programs for precollegiate students, U.S. citizens may become more knowledgeable of the African continent, its languages, and its 55 countries.

	Selected List of Private Schools or Organizations that Teach Arabic
California	Institute of Islamic Studies (Los Angeles)
	Harambee Institute (Berkeley)
Georgia	Sister Clara Muhammad School (Atlanta)
	W. Deen Mohammed High School (Atlanta)
Illinois	Islamic Information & Dawah Center (Chicago)
	Mosque of Umar (Chicago)
Ohio	Islamic School (Canton)
Maryland	Muslim Community School (Potomac)
Massachusetts	Northfield-Mt. Hermon School
Michigan	Chaldean Education Center (Detroit)
	Iraqi United Youth and Dar al-Arkan (Dearborn)
	Michigan Islamic Academy (Ann Arbor)
	Genesee Academy (Flint)
New Mexico	Khalid Islamic School (Albuquerque)
Tennessee	Tennessee Foreign Language Institute (Nashville)
Virginia	Islamic Saudi Academy (Alexandria)
Washington	Islamic School (Seattle)
Wisconsin	Masjid Sultan Muhammad School (Milwaukee)

	Selected List of Public Schools and Organizations that Teach Arabic/Swahili
California	Montessori Center School (Santa Barbara)
	Berkeley High School
Connecticut	Hill House High School (New Haven)
	Hotchkiss School (Lakeville)
District	District of Columbia Public Schools
Georgia	North Atlanta High School (Atlanta)
Illinois	A. Phillip Randolph Magnet School (Chicago)
Maryland	Prince George's County School District
Michigan	Cass Tech High School (Detroit)
	Greenfield Union Elementary School (Detroit)
	Martin Luther King High School (Detroit)
	Fordson High School (Dearborn)
	Lowrey Elementary School (Dearborn)
	Hamtramck High School
Minnesota	International School of Minnesota (Eden Prairie)
Missouri	Southeast High School (Kansas City)
New Jersey	Nassau Elementary School (East Orange)
New York	East High School (Rochester)
Ohio	Academy of World Languages (Cincinnati)
	Louisville High School
	Mifflin International Middle School (Columbus)
Texas	Awty International School (Houston)
	Dunbar Middle School (Fort Worth)
Wisconsin	Martin Luther King, Jr. School (Milwaukee)

Resources

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